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FIRST DISTRICT MEMBER
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Remembering Harvey Milk

May 22nd is Harvey Milk Day in California, a special day of significance celebrating Milk's vision of social change that comes from each individual's opportunity and responsibility to make a difference.

From the repeal of the military's discriminatory "[Don't Ask, Don't Tell](#)" policy, to the passage of the [Matthew Sheppard Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#), to an [executive order](#) mandating visitation rights to LGBT partners in hospitals receiving federal funds, America's promise of equal justice under the law is becoming more of a reality.

These accomplishments toward full equality are directly attributable to Milk's urging of all Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals to come out. Although Milk valued coming out as necessary for every LGBT individual to live in dignity, he also valued coming out for its unmistakable political impact.

The rapid change in the lives of LGBT people in the almost thirty-four years since Milk's assassination can be traced directly to the number of individuals coming out, changing attitudes and experiences across the entire nation.

Last year was the first year a national survey showed a majority of Americans supporting same sex marriage. Today, more Americans know an LGBT person and have direct understanding of unequal treatment against LGBT people, from schoolyard bullying, to job discrimination, to family benefits denied. Recently, when President Obama explained his support for same sex marriage, he cited the ubiquity of LGBT individuals across American life—his own administration staff, social friends, and his daughters' friends' LGBT parents as influencing his decision.

This was Harvey Milk's vision of how social and political change would occur. Milk saw his actions as part of a movement, a movement for more than just LGBT people but "us'es" everywhere. Milk's "us'es" included seniors, workers, ethnic minorities, and disabled individuals—people throughout American society whose wants, feelings, and needs cannot be ignored if every individual expresses who they are and demands change by the example of their own personal dignity.